

AUTUMN 2025

nature forward

Q U A R T E R L Y



**Transforming How You See
the World: Nature Travel
with Nature Forward**



ON THE COVER

Monarch butterfly by Jane Gamble

NATURE FORWARD QUARTERLY

Autumn 2025

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ALISON PEARCE

As I write this column in mid-August, high summer reigns at Woodend Nature Sanctuary. Thunder rumbles nearly every afternoon; the downpours usually, obligingly hold off until our Camp Woodend campers head home. The trails are graced by summer residents—the blue flash of indigo bunting flitting between pink stalks of joe pye weed, the flute notes of wood thrush echoing in the forest. Dragonflies, frogs, and water lilies put on such a vibrant display at the pond that you might wonder if we keep them on the Nature Forward payroll. And yet, I can already feel how quickly summer will slip into fall over the next few weeks. In the morning, the air is cool enough to ponder taking cardigans out of storage. The tulip trees have the faintest tinge of yellow, foretelling the plummet of their leaves to carpet the forest floor, bare limbs left raking across the sky.



It's easy to overlook the lush splendor of a DC summer amid its heat, humidity, and mosquitoes. Given the unrelenting headlines, it is understandable if we give insufficient attention to the spectacle of a deep green season turning inexorably to a blazing orange one. My summer travels, though, inspired renewed appreciation for the climate and ecology of the Mid-Atlantic. I spent five days in the Atacama Desert of Chile, slathering myself with lotion and lip balm as I struggled to adapt to a place where less than an inch of rain falls in a year. It was fascinating to visit vast salt flats, towering sand dunes, and high alpine lagoons where flamingos dabble for brine shrimp in a landscape nearly devoid of vegetation. But it was a sweet and grateful homecoming, driving through the leafy emerald tunnel that is the George Washington Parkway upon exiting the airport.

I can hardly imagine two more different landscapes. And yet, in this Age of the Anthropocene, the Atacama Desert—its people, wildlife, and landscape—are connected by invisible threads to our lives here in the DC region. The global demand for lithium batteries to power everything from cellphones to electric cars is driving a mining boom in Atacama that depletes and degrades the scarce water resources upon which both desert biodiversity and livelihoods depend. The struggle of the indigenous Lickanantay to maintain their subsistence agriculture in Atacama is ultimately connected to the dilemma of data centers in our region (see page 6). Travel has its own impacts, but it does reveal that local environmentalists everywhere are part of a global movement to arrive at sustainable and equitable ways of living into the future. There are no easy answers, but we can begin by paying attention to the remarkable landscapes and natural processes around us wherever we find ourselves. I hope that you will join Nature Forward in doing that at Woodend, on trails around the region, or through Nature Travel. And I hope that you will also join us in advocating for responsible environmental policies that protect people and planet.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alison Pearce'.



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Uniting for Data Center Reform in Maryland

by Lydia Lawrence, Director of Conservation, and Angie McCarthy, MD Conservation Advocate

Nature Forward has always been an organization that recognizes that to protect nature we must be willing to engage in complex, non-traditional battles that not all conservation organizations may have the resources to take on. That is why we created our four conservation priority pillars: 1. Human Health and Access to Nature; 2. Biodiversity and Habitat; 3. Climate Crisis; and 4. Sustainable Land Use. In Maryland, Nature Forward has found data center development to be a monumental threat to all four of these pillars. In fact, we believe data centers to be the most significant conservation, development, and climate justice issue of this decade. To satisfy the global demand for artificial intelligence, tech companies are building massive data centers that consume enormous amounts of electricity and water, while creating significant pollution and other environmental harms. But many politicians ignore these impacts, because they see data centers as the answer to Maryland's budget woes.

While small data centers have existed for decades to support offsite data storage, the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) has resulted in the need for hyperscale data center development that has far outpaced the resources that support it. According to Virginia Sierra Club's Cumulative Impact Report, data centers' anticipated energy commitments in Virginia alone have ballooned from 25 gigawatts (GW) to 60 GW in six months. The industry's projected needs are forcing coal plants that were scheduled to sunset to be kept online. Brandon Shores, a coal plant near Baltimore, was scheduled to be decommissioned this year. It was ordered to stay online through 2029 until the Pennsylvania-New Jersey-Maryland (PJM) regional transmission organization completes \$1.5 billion worth of grid upgrades. Energy is not the only industry impact; the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin found that data centers consume 2–8% of the watershed and could reach 33% by 2050. That would amount to 200 million gallons of water lost every day.

Data centers depend on large diesel generators for backup power in addition to extensive infrastructure buildouts; their business depends on reliability for their tenants. According to a study by Caltech and University of California, Riverside, the emissions from Virginia's backup diesel generators will cost Marylanders tens of millions of dollars from the health impacts of cross-state air pollution. Prior to the Critical Infrastructure Streamlining Act of 2024, any backup generator larger than 2 megawatts (MW) was considered a generating station and required heavy scrutiny from the Public Service Commission (PSC). When Quantum Loophole's

"Data centers are the most significant conservation, development, and climate justice issue of the decade."

—LYDIA LAWRENCE AND ANGIE MCCARTHY



Community members protesting data center development.



public utilities assessment failed after robust community opposition, with Nature Forward and our membership contributing heavily. When the plan to house the FBI at the old Landover Mall site fell through, plans for an 820MW data center campus were proposed with the hopes of breaking ground by 2026. Currently, the county has convened a data center work group and held community listening sessions to gather public input.

In General Assembly 2025, Maryland legislators recognized the importance of quantifying the impacts of

tenant, Aligned Data Centers, applied for a permit for 168 diesel generators (504MW), PSC conditionally approved 70MW of diesel generators, causing Aligned to drop out from the proposed development. Less than 7 months later, Governor Moore championed and signed the Critical Infrastructure Streamlining Act to exempt backup generators from PSC's approval process, paving the way for continued data center development in Maryland and setting a precedent of bending regulations for business interests.

The Critical Infrastructure Streamlining Act was just the start of environmental compromises to attract data center development in Maryland. An article by the *Bay Journal* highlighted the multiple reports of contamination to the Monocacy River from the construction of Qloop, a 43-mile fiber optic cable that would connect Frederick's data centers to Ashburn's. Concurrently, PJM announced the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project, a 500,000 volt transmission line that would require eminent domain to run through parkland to connect hyperscale data centers in Virginia to power plants in Pennsylvania. Currently, Frederick County's planning commission is considering whether to turn 4,000 acres of the county into a critical digital infrastructure overlay zone.

Frederick County is not the only county working to attract data center development. Prince George's County Council has attempted to remove barriers to attract data center development. Fortunately, the last attempt to exempt data center development from a

data center development on the state's energy, land, water, air, and economy. They passed a bill with strong support from both chambers. Unfortunately, Governor Moore vetoed the bill in May, citing state budget constraints.

In response to these ongoing impacts, Nature Forward formed the Maryland Data Center Reform Coalition to promote a more sustainable, transparent, and equitable data center industry. Uniting a diverse group of organizations across the state, the coalition will build awareness among policymakers and the public and mount a coordinated campaign to require the data industry to reduce and mitigate its impacts on Maryland's lands and communities. During the coalition's inaugural meeting in July, Nature Forward had over 20 organizations with a range of expertise: energy, water, local and state policy, labor, and environmental justice. The coalition recognizes the vital importance of data centers to our society, but we believe that each hyperscale data center must be developed in partnership with the community and in balance with the land. Become a part of Nature Forward's Maryland Data Center Reform Coalition or support it at the QR code below.



Transforming How You See the World: Nature Travel with Nature Forward

Imagine being an eyewitness to monarch butterflies filling the skies above the mountains of central Mexico as they launch their 3,000-mile migration north.

Envision yourself on a once-in-a-lifetime journey exploring the vast and beautiful high Arctic and its unique ecology and biodiversity.

Or picture yourself immersed in the lushness of a Caribbean tropical rainforest surrounded by towering trees, and the sights and sounds of dazzling birds and abundant wildlife.

These experiences and many others await participants of Nature Forward's Nature Travel Program, which hosts journeys nationally and internationally. Consistent with Nature Forward's core mission work to advance nature education across the DC region, nature travel can provide unforgettable learning experiences outside the region that deepen our understanding of our place in the natural world.

"Nature travel doesn't just show you amazing places. It can awaken something amazing

inside you," says Nature Forward Senior Naturalist Genevieve Wall. "We hope the traveler who returns from watching humpback whales in Arctic waters or vermilion flycatchers in Arizona's high desert is forever changed by the experience, and carries that connection and responsibility forward with them after they return."

Travel is not an act we take lightly; traveling to see nature's wonders can contribute to their preservation or accelerate their destruction. This troubling paradox is why Nature Forward's Nature Travel Program is firmly committed to the principle of ethical and sustainable travel.

"This is the best trip I could ever ask for. Looking back, I find it almost perfect in every aspect: people, birding experience, hotel stay, food, travel, learning about Costa Rica, and so on. It's amazing! I know it's not achieved by accident. All the leaders worked hard for us to enjoy the trip to its fullest. No words are enough for me to express my gratitude."

—2023 COSTA RICA TRAVELER



Ciao! Travelers from our May 2025 trip to Italy enjoy birdsong, mammal sightings, and cuisine as they explore through central Italy.

Rufous-tailed Hummingbird.



“Meaningful nature travel is much more than sightseeing,” Genevieve explains. “We have a responsibility to design travel experiences that become catalysts for environmental education, cultural connections, and support for conservation efforts worldwide.”

One of the major ways Nature Forward prioritizes conservation ethics, sustainability, and social responsibility is in its selection of tour operators and partners. To ensure the comfort of our travelers, we work with partners who are experts in planning and logistics. But equally important, partners like Holbrook Travel (our partner for Mexico: *Mystical Migration of the Monarch* in February 2026) are dedicated to sustainable travel practices.

“A big part of sustainable travel means engaging with and empowering the local communities who live in the destinations we visit,” says Andrea Holbrook, President/CEO of Holbrook Travel. “It means contributing to the local economy by creating jobs, sustaining a market for local goods and services, and spurring the development of an ecofriendly infrastructure. Perhaps most importantly, local people who depend on a healthy environment for their livelihoods will have an economic incentive to support conservation, to keep forests intact, to protect animals from poaching, and to minimize pollution.”

Holbrook Travel’s achievements include rescuing 500 acres of Costa Rican rainforest, founding conservation organizations focused on the Serengeti and Galápagos Islands, and implementing carbon offset programs since 2009.

“Engaging with local communities and cultures goes hand-in-hand with appreciating and conserving the environment and local natural resources,” Andrea adds. “By making that human connection, travelers have a richer, more meaningful experience that leaves a deeper impression long after they return home.”

This immersive approach has a demonstrated power to transform passive observers into awakened advocates who return home with more than photographs. They also come back with a deeper understanding and new perspectives that influence their daily environmental choices.

“We frequently hear from travelers who say that seeing and experiencing these destinations firsthand was awe-inspiring... but it’s especially moving to see the relationships that continue after the travelers return home,” Andrea explains.

“For example, we’ve had travelers contact us after returning home to ask about donating optics for training future birding guides, or who’ve held fundraising drives for a school they visited, or who have chosen to get more involved in their local nature organizations. Seeing those far-reaching effects is especially rewarding for us.”

Nature Forward’s commitment to smaller travel group sizes, typically 10 to 15 travelers plus expert guides, is another important element of sustainable travel. Smaller groups ensure minimal environmental impact while maximizing educational opportunities. Participants enjoy easier access to their guides and better opportunities for engagement with fellow travelers.

Genevieve is scheduled to lead a nature travel journey to Iceland in August 2026. It’s a return visit to a place she says she fell in love with during a 2022 trip as a newlywed.

“When I close my eyes, I can still feel the waterfall spray on my cheeks, smell the juice from ripe stone bramble fruits, and taste the sweet icy-blue glacier melt water on my tongue,” she reminisces. “I’m grateful for the opportunity to share this extraordinary experience with new travelers.”

Learn more about travel with Nature Forward, including upcoming destinations, at natureforward.org/nature-travel. Proceeds from nature travel directly support Nature Forward’s environmental education, restoration, and conservation advocacy mission work across our local DC region.

Empowering Environmental Leaders in Audubon Estates

by Renee Grebe, VA Conservation Advocate

Congratulations to 17 nature champions who live in Audubon Estates, located in the Alexandria section of Fairfax County. These advocates recently completed their capstone project as the culmination of a 10-month, 18-class community-led litter reduction program. Nature Forward, in partnership with Defensores de la Cuenca, facilitated the initiative.

The *Menos Basura, Más Vida* (*Less Trash, More Life*) program helped residents identify the root causes of litter in their community. It also engaged individuals and families with environmental education across a variety of topics of interest to community members. The program included field trips, public speaking, advocacy, and suggestions on ways to drive change.

The program started with an audit of places where litter is a problem in Audubon Estates. Participants then worked to figure out the sources and root causes of the pollution. Water bottles lids were among the most frequently collected types of debris. That indicated high usage of single-use plastic water bottles (and suggested a distrust of the public water supply). The audit also identified the challenges of broken trash can lids and open (lidless) recycling containers from which materials often escape on windy days. Additionally, advocates found many places where dog waste was left on the ground.

These findings and discussions informed the direction of the program, with classes covering each of identified topics and related issues, too. Participants also took three field trips to:

- **Prince George's Materials Recycling Facility** to see how recycling is collected, sorted, and processed in Maryland (which recycles more kinds of materials than Virginia)
- **Fairfax Water's drinking water treatment plant** to see how our public drinking water gets processed to ensure safe and accessible drinking water for all
- **ReWorld, a waste-to-energy trash facility** in Lorton to see where garbage from Fairfax County and the broader region goes to be reduced to ashes (to take less landfill space) while generating energy for the electrical grid



June 2025: Graduating class of Menos Basura, Más Vida

All of the classes and in-person experiences helped participants decide how to create a community-led initiative to help reduce litter in Audubon Estates. For their capstone project, class participants created four workgroups to focus on developing an information table focused on the following key litter reduction topics:

- Trash pollution in our waterways
- Proper recycling
- Dog waste in our environment
- Composting

Each workgroup developed materials to educate fellow community members about these topics with interactive elements to ensure that learning about these topics was informative, fun, and engaging. On June 13, 2025, Defensores de la Cuenca hosted a community event in Audubon Estates called "Dancing with Mother Earth/Salsa in the Park" where program participants shared their anti-litter project with the larger community.



Nature Forward looks forward to continued collaboration with these environmental champions to help strengthen their leadership as community advocates for a healthier Route 1 corridor and Fairfax County!

Thank you to all of our additional partners who helped make this program a success: Fairfax County's Neighborhood and Community Services, Fairfax County Solid Waste, Fairfax County Stormwater, Prince George's Materials Recycling Facility, Fairfax Water, Arcadia Farms, ReWorld, Audubon's property management team at Hometown America, Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District, and CARU Language Services.

June 2025: Class participants created educational and engaging information tables on the topic of proper recycling, water pollution, composting, and impacts of dog waste.

**Reconciliation & Replanting:
Reclaiming Our Place in Nature's Cycle**

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Author & Ecopsychologist **Lorena Saavedra Smith**
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DC: A Budget Fight for the Ages

by Jamoni Overby, DC Conservation Advocate

After Mayor Bowser's proposed deep cuts to DC's environmental programs, a powerful coalition of residents and advocates helped drive a partial restoration in the final FY26 budget vote. Grassroots efforts organized a "Put It Back" campaign anchoring this effort, with residents mobilizing around priorities like clean water, climate justice, and community health and safety.

On June 13, more than 230 DC residents and advocates testified in person and/or submitted written testimony at the largest Committee on Transportation and the Environment Budget Oversight Hearing in District history. All but a handful testified in support of funding environmental programs, a new record.

Following the Committee on Transportation & the Environment's hearing, on June 16, more than 100 advocates gathered at the steps of the John A. Wilson Building for the Green Budget Day of Action wearing green shirts and rallying in support of local environmental and climate programs. Advocates kicked off the day with a press conference joined by Councilmembers Charles Allen and Matthew Frumin sharing the importance of these programs. After, groups took to councilmember offices in advocacy meetings to demand a city budget that prioritizes nature, health, and equity over stadium renovations and utility subsidies.

The mayor's original proposal sought to slash \$22.6 million from stormwater infrastructure alone, threatening compliance with the Clean Water Act and endangering programs like FloodSmart Homes, RiverSmart initiatives, trash-trap maintenance, and watershed education in Title I schools.

In the July 28 final vote, the DC Council partially restored vital funding, including:

- A fraction of the original cuts to the Stormwater Fee and Bag Funds being reversed.
- Partial funding for preservation of RiverSmart and FloodSmart Homes programs to support flood resilience and cleaner waterways.
- Partial funding for watershed education in Title I schools and Anacostia River boat tours.

No funding was restored for water quality monitoring and green infrastructure maintenance which is mandated under the Clean Water Act. While the final FY26 budget is disappointing, with the Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE) still facing a 20% overall reduction from FY25, these funding reversals represent a significant effort from DC residents and advocates showing the outcome of coordinated advocacy and the powerful visibility generated by the Green Budget Day of Action.



Nature Forward's DC Conservation Advocate, Jamoni Overby, speaking at the DC Green Budget Day of Action

In one of the most challenging budgets in DC, the partial restoration of these funds upholds environmental justice, public health, and climate resilience in DC's most impacted neighborhoods. This outcome demonstrates that community mobilization works—even in challenging political times—when residents and supporters testify, rally, and speak truth to power.

DC residents and advocates remain essential to this process. Stay engaged, volunteer, testify, and continue defending green investments in DC for FY27 and beyond.

Stream Science

“Ad Hoc” Stream Monitoring

The focus of Nature Forward’s community science program is collecting and disseminating stream health data on 25+ monitoring sites, many of which have been monitored seasonally since the 1990s.

With support from Water Quality Monitoring (WQM) volunteers, we’ve also conducted “ad hoc” spring monitoring at two sites that are no longer regularly monitored each season: the Good Hope Tributary of Paint Branch and Bucklodge Branch.

- The Good Hope Tributary site was established in 2011 to monitor the downstream effects of the ICC (Intercounty Connector, MD Route 200). Over the years, stream health, based on biotic sampling, has been fair. While we still hope to see improvement, ad hoc monitoring in 2024 and 2025 indicates that the “fair” trend has continued.
- The Bucklodge Branch site in Boyds, MD was established in 1999. We stopped monitoring here during the pandemic after several volunteers retired from the WQM program and beavers build a dam that converted the stream to a pond. We sampled here this past spring after learning that the beaver dam had been breached. The long term trend had shown good stream health and this held up in April as the team found good aquatic macroinvertebrate diversity. Volunteers were also rewarded with sightings of several Baltimore and orchard orioles as well as a mink.

We also recently completed ad hoc monitoring at Sharp’s at Waterford Farm in Brookeville, Maryland along Warfield Creek, a tributary of the Patuxent River. This was arranged by Gregg Petersen (WQM team leader and former Nature Forward Board member) and farmer-educator Denise Sharp. The farm hosts educational activities, including stream programs, but Denise asked for assistance conducting a more formal stream health assessment. The team, led by Gregg Petersen, had a great morning along Warfield Creek working with Denise. Stream health proved to be excellent! The team found 34 families of macroinvertebrates including 14 “EPT” families (mayflies, stoneflies, caddisflies) and 13 families that are intolerant of pollution or other stressors, like low levels of dissolved oxygen.



Denise Sharp looks over some of the macroinvertebrates found in Warfield Creek.

Please visit the WQM webpage at natureforward.org/water-quality/ for more information about the program, to view a map highlighting current monitoring data and historical trends, and to join our corps of volunteers.



Kids unplug and play at Woodend Sanctuary

Unplug and Explore at Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Did you know playing in nature helps children with:

- cognitive development (creativity and problem solving)
- emotional growth (stress reduction and self-confidence)
- socialization (cooperation and self-awareness)

SCAN TO FIND FAMILY PROGRAMS



To find programs and events that connect your family to nature, visit natureforward.org.

Nature Preschool Update

With three weeks left in our summer, the teaching teams at Nature Preschool are winding down their outdoor adventures and gearing up to get back in the classrooms. In early July, we all got to see each other at the annual Nature-Based Teacher Certification course held at Waldorf Baltimore and hosted by the Association for Nature-Based Education (ANBE). Rose (Preschool Director) and Amy (teacher) facilitated workshops, teachers Andrea and Melanie completed level two of their training, and teacher Maggie completed level one! Rose also traveled to St. Louis, Missouri for the annual Black Educators Network gathering, a group housed within the Natural Start Alliance of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE). She took a tour of Urban Sprouts Child Development Center, a Reggio-Emilia inspired child care founded by Ellicia Lanier in 2009. While all this was going on, teachers Brooke and Marie were in the mix with Camp Woodend, where they had fun in the sun with lots of Nature Preschool alumni.

With all the learning and playing we've been doing this summer, it's no wonder our educators are simply the best at providing meaningful and memorable outdoor learning to children and their families through all seasons. There's still time to enroll for the 2025-2026 school year and experience first-hand the compassionate, knowledgeable team that highlights our preschool community!

Please contact our Nature Preschool Director, Rose Brusaferrro, to schedule a 30-minute tour of our program at Woodend Nature Sanctuary! Email rose.brusaferrro@natureforward.org or call 301-652-8108.

Birthday Parties at Woodend



Explore Woodend Nature Sanctuary with a naturalist for nature-themed activities and games all outdoors!

Learn more at natureforward.org/birthday-parties

Reserve your
child's space now!



Grades
K-5

Days Off Nature Camps

ENJOY THE WONDERS OF WOODEND



1 Individual Days Off Camps (8:45 am - 5 pm)

- Thursday, October 2, 2025
- Monday, November 3, 2025
- Friday, March 20, 2026
- Wednesday, April 15, 2026

Enjoy full days of outdoor nature adventures including activities like catching frogs, learning about pollinators, playing classic camp games, building forts, and more!

2 Winter Mini-Camp (8:45 am - 5 pm)

Monday February 16 - Tuesday February 17, 2026

Join us for a two-day camp full of winter outdoor fun at Woodend Sanctuary! Hike through the forest to find winter wildlife, get creatively crafty, play games, huddle around a bonfire, and build friendships. It's two days of the Camp Woodend experience, now in winter!

3 Spring Break Camp (8:45 am - 3 pm)

Monday, March 30 - Thursday, April 2 2026

Explore the wonders of Spring with a four-day camp at our Woodend Nature Sanctuary! Extended camp option available until 5:00.



Scan the QR code to find your child's days off adventure
or visit natureforward.org/day-off-camps/

And we invite you to visit our Woodend Nature Sanctuary in Chevy Chase, MD. with meadow, forest, and stream habitats, an accessible trail, and a Nature Play Space for children of all abilities. Free and open to the public every day from dawn to dusk!



Woodend's Nature Play Space
was recently featured in
Bethesda Magazine's
"5 Things We Love Right Now"

Camp Woodend: It's a Wrap!

Summer 2025 was certainly one for the books. Campers engaged in aquatic observations, got Wildly Crafty (and muddy and sticky), camped out at Woodend and various parks, hiked a lot—and then some more, played games, rolled logs, got soaking wet in the rain/hose/pond, learned All About Birds and explored Micro Worlds, made memories, picked berries, and built enduring friendships. Thank you for entrusting your campers to us and letting them experience these incredible outdoor opportunities. See you next summer!

Brenna Houck ("Hazelnut") and the Camp Woodend Team



2026 Camp Season

Tell your friends! Registration for the 2026 camp season will open on Thursday, January 22, 2026 at 10 am.



camp 
 woodend
 BY NATURE FORWARD

The Crowder-Messersmith Fund 2025 Grantees

For more information on the Crowder-Messersmith Conservation Fund and to donate please see our web page at <https://natureforward.org/crowder-messersmith-fund/>.

The Crowder-Messersmith Conservation Fund is an international outreach program supported by Nature Forward that provides microgrants for local conservation and education projects in developing countries. Dedicated conservationists continue their work to benefit local communities and biodiversity while navigating a variety of global challenges to achieve their goals. The Crowder-Messersmith Committee awarded their 2025 grants to the following seven groups, with an average award of \$3,000. One country is a first-time recipient of the grant: Mongolia.

- **Bangladesh:** Saving the globally endangered Indian Skimmer (*Rhynchops albicollis*) at its last remaining wintering site in Nijhum Dweep National Park
- **Ethiopia:** Empowering Local Communities, Youth and Grassroots Administrations for Sustainable Management of the Blue Nile Headwaters: Capacity Building on Used Vehicle Oil Handling Practices in Garages, Workshops, and Car-wash Facilities
- **Malaysia:** Responsible Visitation Guides for In-situ Conservation Science Education of the Corpse Flower (*Rafflesia* genus/*Rafflesiaceae*) and Its Host (*Tetrastigma* sp.) in Biodiverse Hiking Areas
- **Kenya:** Community-Led Habitat Restoration and Anti-Poaching for Taita Apalis Conservation in Taita Hills
- **Mongolia:** Conservation of The Critically Endangered Dalmatian Pelican
- **Colombia:** Community based Conservation Strategies to help Increase and Improve the Population of the Endangered Santa Marta Parakeet (*Pyrrhura viridicata*) in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
- **Ghana:** Conservation of the Endangered African Green Sea Turtle in the Keta Lagoon Complex Ramsar Site: Engaging Schools in Turtle Protection and Ecotourism Development

Reports of last year's successfully completed projects are coming in. One is highlighted below.

2024 Grantees

The Tasbaqa Foundation was awarded a grant to promote sustainable conservation of the Central Asian Tortoise through educational outreach and field trips with schoolchildren in Kazakhstan. Using children's drawings from a student competition, tortoise photos, and educational facts, the group designed and printed a large 12-month calendar and distributed it to schools, government bodies, and partner NGOs across the country.



Volunteer Spotlight: Master Gardener at Woodend Joy Adler

Joy Adler has been a cornerstone of our Garden Steward volunteers, tirelessly helping Alice Sturm with the native plant and learning gardens at Woodend. This is what she has to say about her experiences:

When I retired from teaching high school in Montgomery County, I gave myself a gift. That gift, to become a Master Gardener, has kept on giving—for over twenty years. At our first training meeting we were asked to introduce ourselves and to indicate any specific interest. I was vaguely thinking: Flowers? Some vegetables? Could I plant an azalea near the driveway? When one of the newbies announced “hemerocallis” as his specialty, and another said, tersely, “drainage replacement,” I was duly intimidated. Lack of knowledge. But the folks who were already MGs were so warmly inclusive and varied in their interests that classes quickly became “home” for the year.

Nature Forward has been my most consistent volunteer gig, and my most joyous. When I began volunteering, it was a lovely property. But it’s so much more now. Trail, path, bridge, stream, educational markers, ecological restoration, re-treed areas, and even a playground with a sensory garden for children—all of these happening in what seems like just a few visits over time.

“The hours spent are quietly joyous. They feed the spirit.”

—JOY ADLER



Fall in Love with Nature this Autumn!

Wild places are closer than you think®

From field trips to Natural History Field Studies and Nature Travel, adults can find a wide variety of opportunities to learn about and experience nature led by regional naturalists.

Adult Nature Programs

Online Registration for Adult Programs

SCAN TO REGISTER

Sign up at natureforward.org/nature-classes

All changes/cancellations/transfers must be handled through the Environmental Education office. Questions? Call Pam at 301-652-1851 or email pam.oves@natureforward.org



Midweek Meanders Along the Canal

Wednesdays (10 am-12:30 pm)

A: September 10 (Riley's Lock)

B: September 24 (Pennyfield Lock)

C: October 8 (Carderock)

D: October 22 (Violette's Lock)

E: November 5 (Swain's Lock)

F: November 19 (Widewater)

G: December 3 (Great Falls)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Each walk members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Enjoy one or more of these leisurely late-summer through late-fall strolls on relatively close-in portions of the C&O Canal's historic towpath, which see less foot and bicycle traffic on weekdays than weekends. The focus of these naturalist-led walks will be the rich natural history of the varied habitats along the Potomac River and the Canal. We'll proceed at a "naturalist's shuffle" pace, stopping often to observe and enjoy seasonal plant and animal life, including birds, fall wildflowers, fruits, and foliage, butterflies, snakes, turtles—and whatever else we might find. The towpath is flat, but could be muddy and/or uneven. Access to the towpath at Riley's Lock includes stairs or a steeply-inclined foot trail.

Butterfly Boot Camp: Confusing Fall Skippers

Lecture: Thursday, September 11 (7-9 pm)

(Woodend Nature Sanctuary)

Field Trip: Saturday, September 13 (10 am-3 pm) location TBD

(Rain date September 14)

Leader: Rick Borchelt

Lecture only: members \$24, nonmembers \$32

Lecture & Field Trip: members \$48, nonmembers \$68

As if the multitudes of Sachem butterflies weren't confusing enough, early autumn in the mid-Atlantic brings second broods of small, brown, often poorly-marked skippers—Crossline, Swarthy, and the infamous "three witches" —Northern Broken-dash, Dun, and Little Glassywing. Join us as we tick off the ID skills required for these "little brown jobs" of the butterfly world, and then come with us into the field to test our knowledge, but where we will learn that there is no shame in leaving an ID at "sp." for these small, dull-colored species. We'll begin on the Choate Mine Trail at Soldiers Delight NEA northwest of Baltimore and end at the community gardens at the Howard County Conservancy. We should have an abundance of look-alikes to pore through, and might see the seldom-encountered Leonard's Skipper. As an added bonus we could end the field trip with a stop at the nearby Woodstock Snoball Stand! This is the last of three Butterfly Boot Camps.

Natural History of Galls

Thursday, September 18 (7-9 pm)

Leader: Cliff Fairweather

Members \$20; nonmembers \$28

Have you ever looked at a leaf, stem, or twig, and noticed an oddly-textured growth on it? These plant growths are called “galls” – and they’re no accident. Naturalist Edwin Way Teale called galls “edible homes” and that’s not a bad two-word definition for these hijacked bits of plant tissue. Discover the fascinating, often complex, and occasionally bizarre world of galls, gall-makers, and their associates. Through an online lecture via Zoom, we’ll learn about their natural history and develop our gall search-image for further exploration out in the field!

On the Move at Cape May

September 18 (8 am) to September 19 (4 pm)

Leader: Mark Garland

Members \$120; nonmembers \$170

New Jersey’s Cape May is an astounding place to witness autumn migration. Under the right weather conditions, a single day can bring several thousand southbound hawks, tens of thousands of migrating songbirds, and thousands of Monarch butterflies onto the southern tip of the state, and in any weather there’s plenty to see and experience. Waterfowl, herons, dragonflies and even bats also travel through Cape May in September. Under the guidance of an expert naturalist and birder who’s a local (and a former Nature Forward Senior Naturalist!), we’ll visit many of the diverse natural areas around Cape May and celebrate the rich spectacle of fall migration. Overnight options include hotels, B&B’s, owner rentals, and campgrounds in and around Cape May, which are booked by participants themselves.



Red-breasted Nuthatch by Mark S. Garland

Fall in the Parks

(8:30 am-12:30 pm)

A. Sunday, September 21—Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge, VA

B. Sunday, October 12—Patuxent Research Refuge/North Tract, MD

**C. Saturday, November 8—Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, DC
Leader: Stephanie Mason**

Each walk: members \$35; nonmembers \$49

Join a naturalist for these seasonal, broad-based nature explorations of nearby parks rich in natural history. We’ll walk between 2-4 miles as we enjoy the development of fall color and fruits amongst lingering blooms and all manner of wildlife, including insects, resident and migrating birds, mammals, and reptiles and amphibians. Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge near Woodbridge, VA protects open grasslands as well as bottomlands along Belmont and Occoquan Bays. At the Patuxent Research Refuge/North Tract near Laurel, MD we’ll explore Coastal Plain woodlands and wetlands. Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, on the banks of the Anacostia River inside the Beltway, features protected swamp, marsh, and woodland habitats within sight of DC’s urban sprawl. Our explorations will occur on mostly-level natural surface trails which may be muddy, slippery, and/or rutted.

Fall Birding Series

A: Monday, September 22 (Paul Pisano) – National Arboretum, 8:30-11 am

B: Sunday, October 5 (Rob Hilton/Lisa Shannon) – Dyke Marsh, 8-10:30 am

C: Sunday, October 19 (Len Bisson) – Hughes Hollow, 8-10:30 am

D: Tuesday, October 28 (Paul Pisano) – Occoquan Bay NWR, 8-10:30 am

E. Saturday, November 22 (Rob Hilton/Lisa Shannon) – Lake Artemesia, 8-10:30 am

F: Thursday, December 18 (Paul Pisano) – Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, 8:30-11 am

Each walk: members \$33, nonmembers \$46

Our fall birding series visit natural areas under an hour’s drive from DC where a variety of habitats—including field, forest, and wetland—provide good opportunities for the observation and ID of birds in autumn. On the earliest walks, we’ll hope to catch some southbound migrants – including those “confusing fall warblers.” As the season progresses, we’ll watch for sparrows, raptors, waterfowl, and other birds, both resident and overwintering in the region. These teaching walks are aimed at beginning to mid-level birders, but all are welcome. Our explorations will be on mostly level, natural surface trails that may be uneven, muddy, and/or somewhat slippery.

The Magnificent Migration of Monarchs

Thursday, September 25 (7-9 pm)

Leader: Ma. Estela Romero Vázquez

Location: Woodend Nature Sanctuary

Members \$12; nonmembers \$20

Ma. Estela Romero Vázquez is a fifth generation resident of Angangueo, Michoacán, México, a town adjacent to the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve World Heritage site known for its overwintering



concentration of the Eastern population of Monarch butterflies. For one night only, Estela will be visiting the Washington, DC area and sharing her knowledge and passion with Nature Forward's audience. In this talk, Estela will convey how ancestral indígena connected with the annual cycles of Monarch's arrival and overwintering in local forests, and how the scientific research of the last four decades makes clear the wonderful and vital way in which Monarchs impacted their lives. She will share about education and conservation actions happening in Angangueo to support Monarchs' habitat and to raise the next generation as intuitive guardians of the Monarchs' Oyamel forests. As a writer, storyteller, and passionate educator, Estela hopes each person comes away with wonder, gratitude, and increased awareness about how to protect these amazing butterflies.

Wild Wetlands at Patuxent River Park

Saturday, September 27 (10 am-12 pm)

Leader: Bradley Simpson

Location: Jug Bay Natural Area

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Join Habitat Manager Bradley Simpson for the exploration of Jug Bay, a large wetland area along the Patuxent River. Jug Bay boasts a rich diversity of flora such as sweet pepper bush, swamp rose, bog orchids, sweet bay magnolia and many species of oaks and hickories. These plants support the plethora of wildlife species that call this wetland home such as osprey, beaver, marbled salamanders, green snakes, box turtles, and many more. We will explore the Black Walnut Creek Nature Study area which traverses the wetland habitats with bald cypress as well as upland habitats of acidic oak-hickory forests. Bathrooms are available on site.

Natural Heritage Series: Blue Ridge Beginnings

Tuesday, September 30 (9:30 am-2:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

A little more than an hour northwest of Washington, DC lies Catoctin Mountain, the front edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Here, on a day of the week when visitors are few, we'll enjoy early autumn in Catoctin Mountain National Park. We'll hike around 3 miles, at a leisurely pace, as we look for the plants and animals that inhabit the Park's woods and waterways. In addition to natural history, we'll consider the Mountain's cultural history and past land uses. Our explorations will include uphill/downhill hiking over rocky and uneven ground, which may be muddy and/or slippery.

Stages of Shut-Down: Autumn Plant Life Along the Canal

Wednesday, October 1 (10 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Marney Bruce

Location: Violette's Lock

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

In early October, shortly after the fall equinox, the contracting days and lengthening nights spur changes in the plant community. On this walk, we will notice color changes in the trees and shrubs. We'll observe the plants in all stages of shutting down for winter. An abundance of autumn fruits feed the migrating birds and animals as they prepare for colder, harsher weather to come. While we'll focus mostly on plant life, we won't ignore the birds and late-season insects who will round out our ecological excursion along the C&O Canal.

Prowling for Owls

Saturday, October 4 (7-9:45 pm)

Leader: Mark England

Location: Black Hill Regional Park

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Have you ever ventured out after dark and wondered: hoooo's out there? Join experienced "owler" Mark England at sundown to try to hear or see our three most common local owl species: Eastern Screech Owl, Barred Owl, and Great Horned Owl, all of which are present at the park. Mark will demonstrate the basics of owling and talk at length about each owl species. Though the park is usually closed after dark, the leader will have a required night-use permit for our trip.

Fall in Love with Ferns

Saturday, October 11 (9-11:30 am)

Leader: Kit Sheffield

Location: Walker Nature Center, Reston, VA

Members \$33, nonmembers \$46

Explore the beautiful world of ferns on the mostly flat, well-groomed trails of the Walker Nature Center in Reston. The center's 72 acres of woodlands are home to more than fifteen species of ferns, and at least two species of club mosses. We will take a leisurely walk, mostly in the shade, and identify the ferns we see along the way. We'll also talk about what makes a plant a 'fern', and what on earth 'club mosses' are. The variety in soil moisture and sunlight on the center's grounds also allow us to see how ferns have adapted to a variety of habitats—important to know if you plan to incorporate ferns in your own garden. A magnifier or binoculars will be useful to look at some fern features.

Introduction to Tree Identification

Friday, October 17 (10 am-2:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

October is a great month to begin learning to ID our local trees and shrubs. With colorful leaves and this season's seedpods hanging on, there are visible and fairly easy-to-find distinguishing characteristics to help sort out various species. Based at our Woodend Sanctuary, this learning session will begin under an outdoor awning where we'll talk about techniques for tree ID, coupled with the introduction to and practice with a basic, easy-to-use ID key. For the rest of our time, we'll stay outside and practice our new ID skills on the many trees growing on-site. Both beginners and those who want to brush up on their tree ID skills are welcome.



Tupelo by Famartin

Autumn Amphibian Adventure

Saturday, October 18 (4-6:30 pm)

Leader: Jeff Popp

Location: Anne Arundel County – Location TBD

Members \$33, nonmembers \$46

While the amphibians of spring tend to catch our attention for their evening chorus of courtship songs, the fall can be an abundantly active season, too. For example, marbled salamanders give their young a head start by mating in the fall and laying their eggs in depressions that will collect rainfall and snowmelt throughout the winter to become ephemeral pools in the spring. Reptiles are active too; copperheads will mate into mid-October. On this walk, we'll explore trails and observe all the reptile and amphibian life we encounter.

Natural Heritage Hike: Calvert Cliffs State Park

Saturday, October 25 (9:30 am-4 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$40; nonmembers \$56

While most visit Calvert Cliffs State Park for the marine fossils along its Chesapeake Bay Beach, this protected tract in southern Maryland offers rich and varied natural history as well. We'll hike out to the Bay and back (a circuit of 4 miles) as we explore coastal plain forests, marshland, and stream valley habitats. We'll keep our eyes and ears open for all manner of fall wildlife activity, as we make stops along the way to enjoy plant communities in their seasonal aspects. The site's natural surface trails will be uneven and possibly muddy with a mild hill or two. The Park charges a \$5 per car admission fee for MD tags and \$7 for out-of-state tags. Carpooling will be encouraged and facilitated with a central meeting point not far outside the Beltway.

The Underground Underwater

Sunday, October 26 (10 am-3 pm)

Leaders: Alex and Lisa Green

Members \$75; nonmembers \$90

The *Underground Underwater* brings Harriet Tubman's story to life through the lens of the Chesapeake Bay. Explore how waterways, Black watermen, and oysters became powerful symbols of freedom. As the climate changes and sea levels rise, we risk losing these histories and habitats. Discover the untold stories hidden beneath the surface and keep the knowledge alive. This immersive experience blends history, ecology, and culture in an unforgettable way. We'll travel by caravan with stops to walk, learn, and explore. There is an entry fee of \$3 per vehicle at Blackwater NWR. Carpooling will be encouraged.



Sparrows and Finches: An Introduction to the Season's LBJs

Lecture: Thursday, October 30 (7-9:30 pm)

(Woodend Nature Sanctuary) (Mike Bowen)

Field Trip A: Saturday, November 1, 8-11:30 am

(Blue Mash) (Mike Bowen & Anne Cianni)

Field Trip B: Sunday, November 16, 8:30-11:30 am

(Occoquan Bay NWR) (Rob Hilton & Lisa Shannon)

Lecture: members \$24, nonmembers \$32

Each walk: members \$33, nonmembers \$46

It's that time of year when sparrows and finches can present beginning to mid-level birders with some of their most difficult ID challenges. Feeling that way about yourself? You're invited to join one (or both) of our field tutorials for an introduction to the most common sparrows and finches in our region during this season. Tips for recognizing plumage, voice, habitat preferences and more will be shared by our teacher-leader teams. To help you prepare for the walks, leader Mike Bowen will present an optional illustrated photo & vocalization lecture at our Woodend Sanctuary. *Registration for the lecture is separate from the walks.*

Autumn Outing at Mason Neck

Saturday, November 1 (8:30 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Stephanie Mason

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

The Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge near Woodbridge, VA sits on the banks of the Potomac where it protects mature hardwood forest, nearly six miles of shoreline, and the largest freshwater marsh in Northern Virginia. It is one of our leader's favorite local parks and fall is an excellent time for a visit. Explorations on foot will follow the Woodmarsh Trail (natural surface with some mild uphill/downhill) and the Great Marsh Trail which is paved. Distance covered will range from 2.5 to 4 miles, depending on weather, sightings, and size of the group.

Botanical Gems at Little Bennett

Sunday, November 2 (9:30 am-12 pm)

Leader: Carole Bergmann

Location: Little Bennett Regional Park

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

At 3,900 acres, Little Bennett Regional Park in upper Montgomery County, Clarksburg, MD is a protected area where you can still get lost. But don't worry—our leader—former Countywide Botanist and Forest Ecologist for Montgomery County—knows this park well and she can't wait to share its gorgeous autumn display with you. Little Bennett harbors rich species diversity due to its many habitats which also create numerous niches for a wide range of wildlife. We will explore the characteristics of woody and herbaceous plants at the end of the growing season, early-succession piedmont grasses, and the dried remnants of seeds, fruit, flowers, and leaves. Though botany is our focus, we will be attuned to whatever wildlife we encounter. Expect to hike up to 2 miles through a variety of plant communities, including dry and wet meadows, shrub thickets, stream valleys, early successional woods, higher quality maturing upland forests, and riparian bottomlands. Expect some uphill and downhill on natural surface trails, which may be slightly rocky, muddy, and/or slippery. No restrooms at the trailhead.

Take Nothing But Pictures: Nature Phone-tography

Sunday, November 9 (8-11 am)

Leader: Liz Guertin

Location: Pierce Mill, Rock Creek Park

Members \$35, nonmembers \$49

Join Maryland Master Naturalist & Nature Photographer, Liz Guertin, for a journey into phone photography! Liz will cover how to compose great shots using the many creative features & apps possible on your cell phone. All phones welcome! As a special treat, our venue for the morning is the spectacular & historic Pierce Mill, where we'll get to enjoy changing fall colors, moving water, historic buildings, and the beauty of Rock Creek Park. Please bring a freshly charged device.

November's Nature Puzzles

Wednesday, November 12 (10 am-12:30 pm)

Leader: Marney Bruce

Location: Riley's Lock

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

The darkest time of the year draws closer. In mid-November, we will look for signs of trees and shrubs preparing for winter...and for spring. Yes, spring! Buds that were formed in the summer will become evident and fruit from the fall will often still stick around. Plenty of leaves will surround us—some still up in the branches, and others crunching softly under our feet. Why is it that some trees hold onto their leaves so long and others drop them early? On this walk, we'll unpack lots of interesting late-fall nature puzzles.

On the Prowl for Winter Waterfowl

Lecture: Thursday, December 4 (7-9:30 pm)

(Woodend Nature Sanctuary)

Field Trip: Saturday, December 6 (8-11:30 am)

(Gunner's Lake, MD)

Leaders: Mike Bowen & Anne Cianni

Lecture: members \$24; nonmembers \$32

Lecture and Field Trip: members \$49; nonmembers \$69

Early winter is the best time to search for and learn to ID overwintering waterfowl in our area. If you're ready to refresh your skills and learn for the first time, our leader Mike Bowen will offer a lecture at Woodend prior to the in-person field trip at Gunner's Lake in Germantown, MD, where a paved trail around the water allows for easy waterfowl watching with binoculars. While our focus will be waterfowl, we'll keep an eye open for all birdlife. All levels of birders welcome.

Welcome to the World of Winter Trees

Wednesday, December 10 (1-4 pm)

Leader: Bradley Simpson

Location: Sugarloaf Mountain

Members \$33; nonmembers \$46

Ever wanted to know what type of tree you were looking at and despaired because there were no leaves? Never fear, help is here! Join Habitat Manager Bradley Simpson for a winter stroll at Sugarloaf Mountain. On this walk, we'll enjoy December along the trail and learn how to approach identifying trees when their branches are mostly bare.

Solstice Celebration Hike

Friday, December 19 (12-4:30 pm)


Stephanie Mason

Members \$35; nonmembers \$49

The first day of winter is arriving. Whether you call this astronomical event the shortest day—or the longest night—of the year, it's a good occasion to pause the bustle of daily life and join fellow nature lovers on a hike in a beautiful place! Our outing starts at the Widewater area along the C&O Canal Towpath and will move upriver to Great Falls. Here we'll traverse the bridges out to the Great Falls Overlook—and after enjoying the drama and din of the Falls, we'll retrace our steps back to Widewater. As daylight fades on our return walk downriver, we'll look and listen for wildlife activity—primarily birds—as they settle in for the longest night of the year. Expect a round trip of nearly 4 miles on the natural surface towpath at a pace faster than our usual naturalist's shuffle.

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Nature Notes from Genevieve's Journal: Fall 2025

by Genevieve Wall, Senior Naturalist

Welcome to Nature Notes! Those who have met me on Adult Forays know I keep a nature journal. I find the habit sharpens my observations, connects me to the rhythms of nature, and brings me joy. In this column, I'll share some notes from the pages of my nature journal, in hopes that it may inspire you to connect with nature this season.

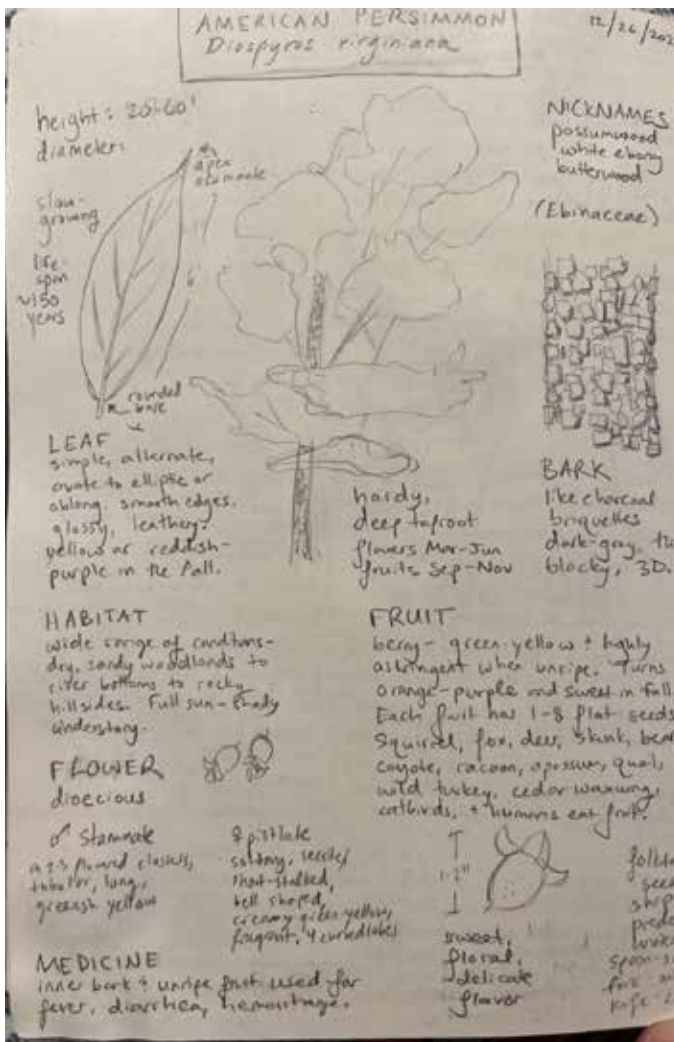
"To love a persimmon is to learn patience."

—GENEVIEVE WALL

It starts in September with a smush of orange on the path. Then two, four, five, like fat raindrops pattering onto the pavement. The taut skin, plump shape, and sunset-colored glow advertise a one-word call: soon.

To love a persimmon is to learn patience. To sink one's teeth into one too early is to recoil from the potent drying astringency inside. Only when the surface is bruised and wrinkling, when the fruit detaches from its cap without resistance, when the white-throated sparrows are back and frost is any day now—only then does the time come.

An intense sweetness. A delicate floral flavor. And within, rounded thumbnail-sized seeds to suck on. Holding a persimmon seed in your mouth for 9 minutes simulates its passage through an animal's digestive tract. As the enzymes in your saliva act upon the seed, your life intertwines with the persimmon. A gift received, a gift given. As the burst of flavor fades from my tongue, I remember: *patience*. Patience to hold the seed. Patience for it to grow. Patience for future fruitfall of persimmons some September many Septembers from now.



Woodend Walks and Tours

Family Programs: Come Explore Woodend with your Family this Fall!

First Saturday of every month—English: 9/6, 10/4, 11/1, 12/6 (9-10 am)

Third Saturday of every month—Bilingual (English/Spanish): 9/20, 10/18, 11/15 (9:30-10:30 am)

Members \$12 a family; nonmembers \$20 a family

Come explore Woodend with your Family this Fall! Join expert naturalists on a leisurely walk through the habitats at Woodend. Explore the wonders of trees, meadows, streams, insects, birds, and everything Woodend has to offer! Limited to 10 families. Only register one adult when signing up. Explora la maravilla de la naturaleza—los arboles, pájaros, insectos y todo lo que Woodend nos ofrece, con uno de nuestros naturalistas. Solo registre un adulto al inscribirse.

Saturday Morning Bird Walk

Second Saturday of every month: 9/13, 10/11, 11/8, 12/13 (8-9 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16. Second person FREE.

Join enthusiastic birders at Woodend to learn birding basics and explore bird life at Woodend. One will learn binocular basics and how to identify common birds as well as explore the wonders of migration.

Note earlier start time

Forest Bathing

Saturday, October 18 (10 am-12 pm)

Leader: Ana Ka’ahunui

Members \$30; nonmembers \$40

Join Forest Bathing guide Ana Ka’ahunui in a soothing exploration and mindfulness walk through the forests at Woodend. Awaken your senses to fall, connect to the present moment, and support your mental health and well-being.

Natural Habitats Tour of Woodend

Saturday, September 20 (9-10:30 am)

Friday, November 14 (10-11:30 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

Boasting 27-acres of forest, five acres of wildflower meadows, and a restored small stream, Woodend is an oasis of natural habitats in our rapidly urbanizing region. Learn about the bees and butterflies that visit our meadows, the frogs and salamanders that breed in our stream, and the many bird species that thrive at our sanctuary.

Native Plants Garden Tour of Woodend

Friday, October 10 (10-11:30 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

Woodend was once a lavish estate with impressive formal gardens. Nature Forward has maintained the beauty of that cultural landscape, while transitioning to native plant gardens that support wildlife and reduce stormwater pollution. Learn tips for tending your own conservation landscape!

Notable Trees Tour of Woodend

Friday, September 12 (10-11:30 am)

Saturday, November 15 (9-10:30 am)

Members \$12; nonmembers \$16

The forest and lawns of Woodend are perfect places to learn more about both native and introduced trees. Master key identification strategies for 20 species, visit county “champion” trees, plus learn about the wildlife habitat and ecosystem services that trees provide in our urban region.

Natural History Field Studies

This unique continuing education program for adults offers a comprehensive and stimulating view of our region's natural history and conservation issues. Taught at the college freshman level, these evening courses are open to anyone 18 years of age or older—nature professionals and beginning enthusiasts alike. A Certificate of Accomplishment in Natural History is awarded to those choosing to complete a required curriculum of 39 Continuing Education Units (CEUs), but anyone can enroll in any class for the sheer pleasure of learning.

Classes are currently being offered via online Zoom sessions with in-person field trips. For a complete list of the classes in the NHFS program, plus instructor bios, visit natureforward.org/nhfs.

Online Registration for Natural History Field Studies

Sign up at natureforward.org/nhfs

Registration is handled completely online. Register at natureforward.org/nhfs.

Questions? Contact pam.oves@natureforward.org.



Required reading lists and instructor bios at natureforward.org/nhfs.

SCAN FOR REGISTRATION,
REQUIRED READING LISTS
AND INSTRUCTOR BIOS

Mammals of the Mid-Atlantic

NATH8290, 3.0 CEUs

Class night and time: Mondays, 6:30-8:30 pm

Class meetings: September 15-November 24; no class on October 13

Lectures via Zoom

Field trip dates: Sunday, September 28, 9:30 am-2 pm (Teale at Woodend Nature Sanctuary); Saturday, October 11, 9:30 am-2 pm (Jug Bay); Saturday, November 15, 10 am-2 pm (Smithsonian Environmental Research Center)

Instructor: Kerry Wixted

Members \$390, nonmembers \$440

Mammals are diverse and fascinating organisms. Through classwork and hands-on field experiences, this comprehensive course will transform your understanding of mammals by examining the characteristics, physiology, adaptations, ecology, and behavior of mammals living in the forests, fields, wetlands, and urban spaces of our region. You'll learn valuable identification techniques by analyzing skulls, skins, tracks, and other clues commonly found in natural areas.



Introduction to Fungi

NATH7203, 3.0 CEUs

Class night and time: Mondays, 7-9 pm

Class meetings: September 15-November 17

Lectures via Zoom

Field trip dates: Sunday, September 21, 10 am-12:30 pm (Woodend Nature Sanctuary); Saturday, October 4, 10 am-2 pm (Patuxent River Park); Sunday, October 26, 10:30 am-2 pm (Adkins Arboretum); and Sunday, November 16, 10 am-3 pm (Mount Rainier Nature Center)

Instructor: Serenella Linares

Members \$420, nonmembers \$470

The world of fungi includes an astounding variety of compelling organisms that have shaped the terrestrial biota in ways we are only beginning to understand. For example, fungi evolved unique strategies of exploitation and cooperation with other organisms. We will explore basic fungi biology, including anatomy and physiology, life cycles, ecology, and evolution. As we pay special attention to our local species, you'll gain a new perspective and appreciation of their place in the ecosystems around us and our daily lives.



US Conservation History

NATH8252, 3.0 CEUs

Class day and time: Wednesdays, 1-3 pm

Class meetings: September 17-December 3

No class 10/15 or 11/26

Lectures via Zoom (final two classes will be hybrid with an in-person option)

Field trip dates: Saturday, October 4, 10 am-1 pm (Prince William Forest Park); Saturday, October 25, 10 am-1 pm (Anacostia Park & Rock Creek Park); and Saturday, November 15, 10 am-1 pm (Accokeek Foundation)

Instructor: Eliza Cava

Members \$390, nonmembers \$440

Challenging and often contentious, our nation's conservation history is complex and captivating. Many of yesterday's conservation "heroes" were environmental visionaries who held complicated (and sometimes racist) views that shaped patterns and divisions that still echo today. If you want a better understanding of the foundational roots of some of today's most pressing ecological challenges, this thought-provoking, no-holds-barred course is for you. For generations, land and natural resources have shaped the lives of Americans, and Americans' perceptions about the environment and its resources have shaped the natural world. In this class, we'll examine differing cultural views of nature and wilderness. We'll study US land dispersal policies and the creation of National Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Refuges. We'll also discuss key conservation policies from 1900 to 1964; environmental and ecology movements from the 1960s to the 2000s; and the intersection of conservation with the climate and environmental justice movements of the 1990s to the present. You and your classmates will also get to explore the origins of conservation issues that you're personally passionate about and share your findings in a written paper and class presentations. Field trips will take you to local sites of historical importance to the conservation movement over different eras.

NOTE: It is recommended to start reading A Sand County Almanac, Silent Spring, and Braiding Sweetgrass as soon as you register.

COMING IN NOVEMBER

Details on winter NHFS classes, available in late fall at natureforward.org/nhfs.

Winter Tree ID

Bradley Simpson

Birds of the World

Gemma Radko

Weather and Climate

Randy Bass



Nature Travel

Nature Forward's Travel program offers our members and friends opportunities to search for wildlife and explore the wonders of nature outside the mid-Atlantic region. Group size is typically limited to 12-14 people, and many trips fill early. Email pam.oves@natureforward.org for complete itineraries and registration information or visit natureforward.org/nature-travel.

The Mystical Migration of the Monarch

February 17-23, 2026

Leaders: Mark Garland & in-country guide – with visits from Estela Romero!

Cost: \$4,025 (single supplement \$475)

The sight of overwintering monarchs clustered together among the trees in Northern Mexico is one not easily forgotten. Each year, hundreds of millions of Monarchs fly across the Gulf and reach their overwintering grounds in the high volcanic mountains across the southern end of the central Mexican plateau. These high-altitude forests offer incredible opportunities to come face-to-face with mindboggling quantities of monarch butterflies in the fir forests and streams. On this trip, you'll explore multiple Monarch Sanctuaries, and marvel at the incredible lives of these butterflies, while also enjoying the mountains, birds, flora, Aztec architecture, cuisine, and more! Some of the bird species that can be found in these habitats are Red Warblers, White-eared Hummingbirds, Striped Sparrows, and the Black-vented Oriole. When we descend from the monarch sanctuaries, we'll enjoy the region's rivers, waterfalls, and subtropical forests—including an afternoon at a relaxing hot spring, perfect for decompressing after our hikes in the mountains.

Mark Garland returns to lead this trip, and the group will be visited by fifth-generation Angangueo resident, monarch educator, and storyteller Estela Romero. Curious to meet her? Come join us on September 25 for a one-night-only event, as Estela journeys up to Woodend to share about the marvels of monarch migration!

Photo by Mark S. Garland



Dear friends:

The multigenerational, international migratory cycle of monarch butterflies is one of North America's most spectacular wildlife phenomena. Entomologists and casual observers have long marveled at their southward flights in early fall, but their destinations weren't discovered by scientists until 1975. They gather by the millions in just a few sites high in the mountains west of Mexico City. Join me in February to experience the magic of these massive aggregations. Our itinerary visits three different monarch reserves, and while each features millions of monarchs, they each have their own character. It's not an easy trip – each reserve requires some walking and/or horseback riding to visit, and the monarchs are usually gathered at elevations above 10,000 feet – but nothing I have ever experienced matches the feeling of being in the midst of millions of monarchs, knowing they have all completed long migratory flights to get there. I have visited the reserves twice, and I'm eager to return and experience this again.

Espero que viajemos juntos,

Mark Garland

Costa Rica: A Trove of Tropical Birds—and Much More

March 5-17, 2026

Leaders: Stephanie Mason & in-country guide Eddie Recio
Cost: \$5,375 (single supplement is \$1,000, with limited availability)

For well over 20 years, Stephanie Mason has led popular Nature Forward travel trips to this small tropical wonderland with amazing plant and animal diversity. Costa Rica's colorful birds—from the glimmering hummingbirds to the rainbow-hued tanagers to the large, comical Toucans—will turn any nature enthusiast into a bird lover. Our trip explores Caribbean lowland rain forest, southern Pacific foothills, and other protected wildlands. Registration opens soon!



Iceland: Landscapes, Puffins, and Legends Beneath the Solar Eclipse

August 3-13, 2026

Leader: Genevieve Wall
Cost: \$13,995 (single supplement \$2,395)

Iceland is famous for its unique scenery: it is the "land of fire and ice," where volcanoes and glaciers have carved paths across the landscape, where breathtaking waterfalls plunge off of cliffs, where scrappy wildflowers and berry bushes take advantage of the short summers, where pelagic birds gather in large numbers, and where—even in August—there is a chance to faintly glimpse northern lights shimmering overhead. Experience the raw, roaring power of the falls; the lush landscapes at Þingvellir, where placid surface waters hide a separating fault line 200 meters deep; the deep blue silence in the heart of an ice cave; the cacophony of gregarious puffin colonies; and the rhythmic ejections of water and steam from powerful geysirs. Our adventure is timed so that we will be in the path of totality for the solar eclipse on August 12. Join Senior Naturalist Genevieve Wall on this trip of a lifetime! Registration open!



Coming soon!
Peru: From the Andes to the Amazon
October 10-19, 2026

Email pam.oves@natureforward.org to receive a detailed itinerary and registration packet with trip fee as soon as it becomes available. Registration and trip deposits will not be accepted in advance of the packet's release.



Photo by William Cook Photography



Photo by Mason Photography



Woodend Sanctuary & Mansion

woodendsanctuary.org

Social and
Corporate Events

[@woodendsanctuary](https://www.instagram.com/woodendsanctuary)



Photos by Mason Photography

FALL BIRD FEEDERS AT WOODEND NATURE SHOP

Open daily 11am-3pm | Closed Sunday



Welcome a variety of birds to your backyard this Fall with our selection of high quality bird feeders.

Members receive 10% off!

Visit us at natureforward.org/shop or call (301) 652-3606.

woodend 
nature shop
BY NATURE FORWARD

Data Shows Habitats and Wildlife are Thriving at Woodend

by Bradley Simpson, Habitat Manager, and Alice Sturm, Director of Restoration

The Restoration Department is tasked with restoring and managing the wild lands of Woodend, including our forests, meadows, and gardens. Our goal is to provide an urban oasis of habitat for wildlife, native plants, and people. We do this by removing invasive plant species, planting or seeding native plant species, and managing stormwater and our tree canopy in ways that maximize environmental benefits. For example, we treat our stormwater on site to maximize groundwater recharge including using our series of step pools to trap pollutants and stop them from reaching Rock Creek and the Chesapeake Bay. We also leave as many dead trees as safety allows either standing or as “snags” and allow natural detritus such as leaves and branches to accumulate as habitat wherever possible.

While we work hard, we also aim to work “smart” and ensure that our efforts are targeted where they will be most successful at achieving our habitat goals. To effectively manage Woodend’s land, we collect numerous types of data about the species composition and habitat. Data is collected through in-house volunteer sessions as well as with the help of many partners.



American University students learning tree coring techniques at Woodend.

Starting in spring and continuing throughout the summer, forest surveys are conducted by staff and volunteers in a section of Woodend’s 30 acres of forest. The forest is split into 5 equally sized sections with a section surveyed each year so that our entire forest is re-surveyed on a 5-year rotation. In each section, all trees over one inch in diameter are identified, measured, and tagged. In addition to all trees, we sample a portion of the small trees and shrubs and conduct groundlayer surveys to track the herbaceous species and tree seedlings present in the forest.

“While we work hard, we also aim to work ‘smart’ and ensure that our efforts are targeted where they will be most successful at achieving our habitat goals.”

—BRADLEY SIMPSON

Also during the spring and summer, volunteers monitor our nest boxes to track bluebird populations in the area. Data is uploaded to Cornell's NestWatch program. Volunteers, staff, and summer campers also conduct visual surveys of pollinators and floral relationships in the meadows. Together with the nest surveys, these help us understand how effective our meadow restoration is in supporting wildlife diversity.

Another important type of data collection is our stream monitoring. In early spring, we begin tracking wildlife species that need aquatic habitat for their lifecycle, such as amphibians and aquatic macroinvertebrates. We are particularly interested in population changes related to spotted salamanders and wood frogs. In the years since our stream restoration was completed, spotted salamander egg masses have increased tenfold because of our step pools being more reliably filled with water throughout their lifecycle.

Partnerships with outside researchers from universities allow us to collect even more data throughout Woodend's natural habitats. Meg Jarvis, a student at the University of Brighton, investigated macroinvertebrate populations post-stream restoration and compared their data with pre-restoration surveys to determine how these populations changed as a result of management. They found that sensitive taxa, particularly beetles and dragonflies, increased substantially, likely due to the added wetland vegetation that was not present prior to restoration. Carsyn Bennett from George Mason University will soon be investigating underwing moth populations and how their numbers are influenced by various forest attributes in urban areas. We have also partnered with Professor Dr. Chelsea Koch at American University to conduct various studies for her Environmental Research Methods course. Students come to Woodend to learn different techniques including soil coring, tree coring, forest surveying, stream monitoring, and much more. The collected data is another layer of research that aids in effective management of Woodend's habitats.

Nature Forward's restoration team could not effectively manage the many habitats of Woodend without this important data. We value the help from volunteers, summer campers, and outside experts! If you are interested in helping us learn more about Woodend's habitats, please contact Habitat Manager, Bradley Simpson, at bradley.simpson@natureforward.org. To become a Nature Forward volunteer and participate in these and other opportunities, contact Volunteer Coordinator at peihan.orestes@natureforward.org.



Spotted salamander egg mass found at Woodend.



Summer campers conducting an aquatic life survey at Woodend.

Birding with a Purpose:

Nature Forward Reaches Fundraising Goal with 45th Annual Birdathon

The final tally is in and the 45th Annual Birdathon raised more than \$75,000 for Nature Forward's education, conservation, and restoration programs! This year's top Birdathon fundraising teams include:

- Team Mason/Oves/Wall - \$12,980
- Team Cottingham - \$8,518
- Nature Forward Board - \$7,725
- David Blockstein and Debra Prybyla - \$5,522
- Alison Pearce - \$2,500
- Carolyn Peirce - \$2,350

Thank you to everyone who participated in this springtime fundraising tradition, either by counting birds, attending a Birdathon event, purchasing Birdathon merchandise, or making a donation.

We are also very grateful to Dr. Linda Lear and Mr. John Nickum. Thanks to their generous gift, every donation to this year's Birdathon was matched up to \$25,000.

Fundraising dollars like those raised through the Birdathon provide essential support for Nature Forward's environmental mission work. You can find more highlights in our 45th Annual Nature Forward Birdathon Post-Campaign report at natureforward.org/birdathon/.



Nature Forward board member Diane Wood participates in the Birdathon along with other current and former board members, raising over \$7,700.



WHY WE SUPPORT THE NATURE FORWARD BIRDATHON

by Anne Cottingham

What's not to like about the Birdathon? For 46 years, this venerable springtime fundraiser has challenged participants to raise funds for Nature Forward programs by identifying as many wild bird species in the field as possible in a 24-hour period. First, ask friends and family to pledge support for your "hunt" (and add your own contribution). Then, armed with binoculars, bug juice, caffeine, and odd birding garb, head to your favorite bird haunts: woodlands, fields, meadows, marshes, beaches, rivers, garbage dumps, etc. For my husband and me, the Birdathon is a test of hearing, eyesight, insect endurance, good humor, and patience, as well as birding skills. The results vary, depending on weather and being in the right place at the right time. But whatever the outcome, your species list will produce a fascinating annual snapshot of wild bird species found at any given moment in any given place. Whatever the future holds for our beleaguered planet, the onset of spring migration is something to behold, and you can experience it firsthand in the Birdathon. See you next year!

**Dr. Linda Lear
and
Mr. John Nickum**

Thank you to our Sponsors:



Woodend After Dark Highlights

Our Annual Woodend After Dark fundraising gala was an enjoyable and memorable success!

Thank you to all who joined us on June 5 for an elegant and exciting evening filled with delicious food, fun, and fellowship at the beautiful Woodend Mansion. The event brought together more than 100 delighted guests for a perfect opportunity to forge new friendships and strengthen our connections. The event raised more than \$37,000 to support Nature Forward's vital nature education, restoration, and conservation mission work!

Woodend After Dark attendees enjoyed a selection of wonderful hors d'oeuvres, a delicious plated dinner served to their table, and mouthwatering desserts, all accompanied by an open bar. Many, many thanks to Corcoran Caterers for the generous gift of their top-quality services. "Corcoran was excellent," remarked one guest.

Event partner Owl Moon Raptor Center offered guests an upclose look and learn with an amazing raptor, while first-time partner Calluna Flower Truck provided a beautiful floral bouquet to every Woodend After Dark guest.

Junior Jazz Lab, a talented septet featuring six student musicians joined by their instructor, Nii Akwei Adoteye of 11th Hour Music, delivered lively and entertaining musical performances throughout the event.

With its many nature-themed items, from outdoor experiences to art to imaginative baskets, our annual Silent Auction is always a much-anticipated element of Woodend After Dark. This year, seven first-time auction sponsors added even more fun and excitement with new dining experiences, fine wines, special tours and classes, and more. These additions, along with ever-popular cabin getaways and private nature walks, made for an exciting evening in which bidders purchased every single item, raising over \$10,000 through the auction alone!





Welcome Douglas

Douglas McRae comes to Nature Forward as our new Grassroots Engagement Coordinator after over a decade in higher education. He has taught global, environmental, and Latin American history at Georgetown University, Gettysburg College, the University of Maryland, and The George Washington University. Douglas previously worked as an Education and Outreach Coordinator at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University. In 2017, Douglas conducted research on the history of water and sanitation in São Paulo, Brazil with the support of Fulbright US Student Program, and he has written and published several pieces on urban and environmental history. Douglas is also a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer in Peru, where he lived and worked as a Community Health Educator from 2008 to 2011.



Farewell Debbie

The Nature Preschool wishes our incredible Oaks assistant teacher, **Debbie Borkowski**, continued success in the growth of her yoga and mindfulness practice as she begins a Masters program in Yoga Therapy this Fall. Debbie's sweet and thoughtful approach to early childhood education highlights her gift for seeing the whole child. Her calm and inviting demeanor, and big toolbox of skills and ideas, modeled for each of us how to stay fully present and connect with ourselves and the natural world. We're delighted for Debbie to keep using her light to make the world a better place and look forward to one day seeing her back in the classrooms as a volunteer when her busy student schedule allows! Congratulations and thank you, Debbie!



Farewell Kristin

Kristin Gazmon Cook, Nature Forward's Database and Email Assistant, is stepping away from her role after seven years of amazing creativity. A passionate nature advocate in her free time, Kristin has been a valued member of our Marketing and Communications Team with her graphic design, database management, and email marketing skills, among other contributions. One of her chief duties was designing and editing our monthly eNews, one of our key ways of keeping our community up-to-date on Nature Forward. Kristin also originated our successful weekly Adult Programs email to help readers find timely ways to connect to nature.



camp woodend
BY NATURE FORWARD



THANK YOU

to our campers
& families for a
fantastic summer!

**We're
already
looking
forward
to 2026!**

Watch for our 2026
Camp Woodend
Catalog
to be
mailed
in mid-December



**2026
Camp Woodend
registration
opens
January 22, 2026
at 10am**

SPECIAL MEMBER PRICING!

Questions?
Email
pam.oves@natureforward.org

Memorial and Tribute Contributions

MAY-JULY 2025

IN MEMORY OF:

Becky Allen
M.J. Alexander

Gary Evans
Barbara Nash

Diane Hoffman
Carl Hoffman

Robert and Frances Lawrence
The Robert J and Frances V Lawrence Foundation

Mary Anne Nester
Teddy & Michelle Repa

Ken Parr
Heidi Crosland

IN HONOR OF:

Renee Grebe
Catherine Bennett

Nancy Voit
Heidi H Hanson

CALL for SILENT AUCTION DONATIONS!

nature forward
Autumn Lights

Do you have an exciting item?

Traditionally, our most successful auction items include vacation getaways; outdoor nature experiences like private tours and walks; dining gift certificates; and themed gift baskets.

Please note that we can't use artwork or clothing. We can only accept new items. Thank you!

And please plan to join us on
Saturday, Nov. 22
6:00 - 9:00 pm
Woodend Mansion
8940 Jones Mill Rd
Chevy Chase MD

To donate items, please contact Talissa Bavaresco, Special Event and Sponsorship Manager, at talissa.bavaresco@natureforward.org before Oct. 22, 2025

Donations benefit Nature Forward's mission work and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

natureforward.org/autumn-lights

Registration Information

Education programs are held at Woodend, Nature Forward's 40-acre Headquarters, 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase, MD 20815, unless otherwise noted. All education programs except Nature Travel have online registration. You will be notified immediately if the program is full; otherwise, confirmation letters, with directions, will be emailed 1-2 weeks before the scheduled program.

Lectures are held at our Woodend Sanctuary, and field trip transportation is by private vehicle or carpool unless otherwise noted. Most programs are limited to 12 participants and also have a minimum enrollment, so early registration is important to ensure that programs run. Unless noted, weekend adult foray program fees do not include meals or lodging.

Because our programs rely on registration fees for funding, we have adopted this policy:

- Cancellations must be made at least six working days before the beginning of the program to be eligible for a credit to your account, less a \$5 administrative fee.
- If an adult foray is canceled by Nature Forward due to low enrollment, you will receive a full refund. If a weather-related concern or another issue outside of our control forces a cancellation, you will receive a full credit to your account.

- Nature travel programs have different cancellation policies, explained on the information sheet sent on request.

Nature Forward is committed to addressing problems when they occur. Program participants are encouraged to bring problems or concerns of any kind directly to the staff member in charge of the program. Staff members will try to resolve the problem immediately or as soon as reasonably possible. If staff is unable to do so, they are expected to bring the problem to the attention of their immediate supervisor or member of the Senior Management Team, who will take responsibility for seeking a resolution. Program participants are welcome to bring unresolved problems or concerns to the attention of the Executive Director. The Executive Director's decision on resolution of the problem is final.

Health Guidelines for Programs

Please stay home if you are sick. Nature Forward follows CDC guidelines for communicable diseases. Policies are subject to change.

Nature Forward Annual Meeting at Woodend Sanctuary

Thursday, October 23, 6-8:30 pm

Speaker: Lydia Lawrence, Director of Conservation at Nature Forward

“Data Centers and Climate: Taking Action for Smarter Artificial Intelligence”

Calling all Nature Forward members! Be sure to join us for the 2025 Annual Membership Meeting. The evening event will include a fiscal year wrap-up presented by Executive Director, Alison Pearce, recognition of our Volunteer of the Year, and election of members to the Nature Forward Board of Directors. Coffee and dessert served.

Please RSVP to this free event at <https://give.natureforward.org/AMM25> by Friday, 10/17.

BOARD ELECTIONS:

Nature Forward members will vote on candidates for the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting. An official notice including profiles of the slate of Board candidates presented by the Nominating Committee will be posted at natureforward.org/board after October 1.



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Autumn Lights

Saturday, November 22
6:00 - 9:00 pm
at Woodend Nature Sanctuary
8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase MD

You are invited!



Tickets are \$75.00 per person. Scan the QR Code to purchase <https://give.natureforward.org/AL25>

Join us to kick off the holiday season with a lovely evening with friends, food, drinks, music, and our exciting auction!

This festive event supports Nature Forward conservation, restoration, and education programs.

Questions or Accommodations? Contact Talissa Bavaresco, Special Event & Sponsorship Manager at (301) 450-1381 or talissa.bavaresco@natureforward.org